

March 7, 2022

To: Environment Committee

From: Jeff Shaw, West Hartford

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 5291, An Act Authorizing Bonding for Bikeways, Greenways, and Recreational Trails**

Dear Senator Cohen, Representative Gresko, Senator Miner, Representative Harding and distinguished members of the Environment Committee, my name is Jeff Shaw, a Board member of the Connecticut Outdoor Recreation Alliance (CORA) and I support HB-5291, An Act Authorizing Bonding for Bikeways, Greenways, and Recreational Trails.

CORA is a coalition of over 70 businesses, organizations, and individuals who support the protection and development of Connecticut's outdoor recreation economy. CORA elevates outdoor recreation by promoting the intersection of resources (e.g., parks, trails and waterways) users (e.g., skiers, hikers, boaters) and organizations (e.g., businesses, nonprofits, and educational institutions).

The proposed legislation seeks to increase bond funding for bikeways, greenways and recreational trails from \$3 million to \$6 million effective July 1, 2022.

Demand for recreational trails is growing, and this proposal would double the bond authorization for Connecticut's Recreational Trails and Greenways Grant Program. Recently, UConn Extension's Trail Census reported increased trail use during the pandemic as more residents found respite in the outdoors. Similarly, the Outdoor Industry Association reported participation in outdoor recreation remains high compared to pre-pandemic levels. Additionally investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure will be needed to help communities recover from the pandemic.

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) previously awarded Recreational Trails and Greenways Grants totaling \$3 million to help plan, build, and improve trails across the state. While that investment is appreciated, it does not address the enormous need across the state, reflected in 65 applications requesting over \$22 million for the \$3 million program. A few highly ranked proposals alone totaled over \$7 million. The previous grant cycle also funded a fraction of what was requested and similarly declined highly ranked proposals due to a lack of funds.

Investing in recreational trails has a multiplier effect that contributes to strengthening Connecticut's economy, quality of life and aid in the pandemic recovery. UConn Extension's Trail Impact Series recently published research on how trail users spend money at local businesses near trail heads, home buyers value a property's proximity to trails, equitable access to fitness activities improve public health, and trails provide transportation alternatives and complement conservation projects. The multiplier effect cannot be overstated.

For all those reasons, I ask you to support HB-5291, which will increase funding for outdoor recreation. This legislation is another step towards safer, more vibrant and welcoming outdoor recreation opportunities in Connecticut.

Please support HB-5291. Thank you.